

EVERYDAYHEROES



PHOTO BY JIM ROBERTSON

Ashland Police Sgt. Ryan Conley

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Commitment to his team, passion for his community and vision for the future all are part of what Ashland Police Sgt. Ryan Conley hopes to emulate as a supervisor. His 14 years in law enforcement have provided him with plenty of ups and downs and just as many stories to share. When he leaves the station, the 36-year-old Ashland resident shares his life with his wife, Amy, stepson, Jordan and their horses.

As my career has evolved at APD, I have been able to serve in nearly every special assignment, up to my current duty as sergeant of the Support Services Section. I wanted to gain as much expertise as possible with hopes of being a supervisor. When I was promoted to sergeant, I was confident I would be a good supervisor. I obtained advice from many others, worked hard and sacrificed to put myself in a good position for promotion. I believed that being a good officer would guarantee being a good supervisor. That confidence took a pounding when I attended the Academy of Police Supervision.

They have you take a pretest where they send out questionnaires to people who work with you, and when we got there, they gave me that first. I was a little upset because I thought I was a great supervisor. When people would come to me, I really wanted to help them and show them how to do it. They weren't asking me to do it for them, they were asking me what they needed to do. In my mind, I was trying to help. In their mind, it was a little too much help, and that wasn't helping our relationship at all. I would have never realized that.

As I sat in class with a spinning head, slightly defensive attitude, and transparent expression, Lt. Jim Donaldson with the Covington Police Department smiled and told me, 'Ryan, drink the Kool-Aid brother.' I did, and I doubt I do anything at work or at home the same way that I did before graduating from APS.

Understanding leadership and emotional intelligence changed the way I perceive situations and most importantly, how I treat people. I decided to continue learning and to expand my personal growth based on this new foundation, and to help other officers do the same.

Going to APS made me realize that everybody pretty much feels the same, that there's

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nothing special about me or what happens to me. Once I realized all that and got the “Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement” book — I really thought the author knew me. It was almost spooky reading something like that. I knew since I related to it there was no reason to think everybody else wouldn't either.

I could not share the book fast enough with my co-workers. I spoke to a local librarian, and she found a way to provide several copies for our officers. I encouraged them to have their spouses read them, too. What I ran into was my spouse didn't want to read it. That's a huge barrier to break for them to have some realization of what you're going through. It works for them, too. Hypervigilance kicks in and everybody goes through those emotions.

Our Fraternal Order of Police lodge purchased the video, and we invited surrounding agencies and their family members to a unique take on dinner and a movie. After the video, we took time to talk together as both police officers and as family members. It was good. There were some great realizations there.

I encourage all my colleagues to take time for personal growth outside police work. My life outside the station comes in the form of a barn. My wife runs her own stable, and I have the unique pleasure of gaining not only a wife and son, but also an extended barn family. The kids at the barn allow me to stay in touch with pure joy. When I look back on my life, I want to be proud of it — all of it, not just the times I put on my uniform.

As a team, we participate in several activities outside of work, too; whether it is a physical training contest or fantasy football, it is a break from the rigid standards and responsibilities we all maintain. Recognizing birthdays and buying a new Bunn coffee pot can go a long way in identifying their efforts and reminding everyone you care. We probably spend more time with each other than we do our own families and must maintain an atmosphere of camaraderie and respect. We have bad days and it's a comfort to arrive at work and know you will be supported.

I was serving as a detective in 2007 when the call came in from the U.S. Marshal's Service about an escapee and bank robber, Tony Artrip. Artrip's wife and children live in Ashland and everything indicated he was coming home and bringing trouble with him. My supervisor assigned me to assist in capturing Artrip. He never stayed in one state very long. I spent a whole lot of nights watching all night long. As soon as there was a bank robbery we knew he would be back. He was pretty slippery.

I was assigned as a special deputy U.S. Marshal to serve on the task force that eventually captured Artrip. My assignments mainly kept me in Ashland, where we could set up and maintain a central data center on his crime spree. After numerous bank robberies, Artrip's status was upgraded to the U.S. Marshal's Service Top 15 Most Wanted. He was also featured on the television show, America's Most Wanted. This was the largest manhunt I had been involved in and was in unfamiliar federal jurisdiction. The false leads were nearly overwhelming.

He was captured in Pennsylvania at a Knights Inn. The whole time I was here running data, and they kept me on the phone. They were saying, 'We got him! We got him!' I could hear them going in the building. They were describing the room to me and then I heard, 'Oh my god, he's in the ceiling.' They ripped out the ceiling, and he had just eaten some Kentucky fried chicken. They had to pull him back down. As he was being restrained, he just kept begging the officers to shoot him.

I think it had a big effect on me. Everyone was so willing to cooperate and get involved. I hope anybody you would ask around here who calls and gets ahold of us sees that same kind of cooperation. I know they do from me because I go out of my way, knowing that they're not here, but their case is just as important as if it were my case. This doesn't happen without that cooperation of local, state and federal agencies from several states to one common goal; to catch a bad guy. 🐾

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